

French Court Probes Ben Barka Scandal

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PARIS (AP)—A French magistrate starts an inquiry today in an attempt to get to the bottom of the biggest scandal of President Charles de Gaulle's Fifth French Republic — the kidnaping of Moroccan leftist leader Mehdi Ben Barka. Magistrate Louis Zollinger's investigators have been gathering evidence for two months. During his secret sessions he will question about 25 Frenchmen implicated in the case. The kidnaping of Ben Barka, 45, in Paris last Oct. 29 has caused a diplomatic rift between France and Morocco and a major political scandal in France. The missing man is presumed to have been murdered.

France has accused Mohamed Oufkir, Moroccan interior minister, of staging the abduction and has issued a warrant for his arrest. King Hassan II of Morocco last night denied that his government was responsible and has refused to recognize the French warrant against Oufkir, his military mainstay.

De Gaulle Aide Accused

Two French police officers and a secret service agent are under arrest in connection with the case. A member of President de Gaulle's personal staff is accused of being implicated and De Gaulle shook up the French secret service.

France and Morocco have

recalled their ambassadors from each other's capitals.

Ben Barka had been sentenced to death twice in Morocco on charges of trying to overthrow Hassan, but the king pardoned him and reportedly was considering inviting him back from exile to head a legal opposition. There is speculation that Oufkir feared Ben Barka threatened his power.

A key piece of evidence before Zollinger's inquiry is a tape recording of a journalist's interview with ex-convict Georges Figon, who had been sought as a witness in the case. Figon died of a gunshot wound in his apartment on Jan. 17 as police closed in on him. His

death was officially declared a suicide.

While police were looking for him, Figon gave a number of interviews. The news magazine L'Express has printed extracts of what it says is Figon's recorded interview. In it, Figon said he saw Ben Barka after the kidnaping tied to a heating pipe and bleeding from knife wounds in the suburban home of Antoine Lopez, a secret service agent and an official of Air France. Lopez is one of the men under arrest.

Two Policemen Arrested

Two policemen under arrest have admitted seizing Ben Barka from in front of the new American-style drugstore on the Left Bank but said they believed they were helping to arrange a political meeting.

"One of them, Louis Sochon, said he thought the action was "covered" by Lopez. Lopez in turn said Figon told him he was covered by a Gaullist member of the National Assembly, Pierre Lemarchand.

Lemarchand was Figon's lawyer. He has said he could not reveal Figon's story because Figon came to him as a client.

De Gaulle is reported enraged by police involvement in the case and by what he considers Moroccan violation of French sovereignty.